

### Book Reviews

*The African Witch*, by MICHAEL GELFAND, Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone, 1967, pp. xvi, 227, illus., 30s. 0d.

Dr. Gelfand, Professor of Medicine in the University College of Rhodesia, is a prolific writer. This, his latest book, is a welcome addition to the literature of traditional magic, medicine and witchcraft of Africa, and it is recommended. I see it as a companion to Dr. Gelfand's previous books, *Medicine and Magic of the Mashona* (1956), *Shona Ritual* (1959) and *Witch Doctor* (1964). Dr. Gelfand's extensive clinical experience in orthodox European medicine and his deep interest in the African way of life are full qualifications to produce a book such as this. Those of us concerned with tropical medicine are much in debt to Dr. Gelfand for his classic work, *The Sick African* (1943; 3rd ed., 1957). His more recent books on magic are appropriate supplements to *The Sick African* and the bridge between them is *Medicine in Tropical Africa* (1961) and *Medicine and Custom in Africa* (1964). *The African Witch* is more practical, simple and readable than the usual productions on African magic which are usually written these days by social anthropologists who are prone to highly complex theorizing often without adequate basis in observed fact and phenomena which are the traditional bases for medical documentation. The book deals almost entirely with the Shona people, but the information is applicable to most other groups of African negro tribes. Dr. Gelfand obtained his information from patients and medicine men, and from police and court records. He discusses the *nganga* and the *muroyi*. The former practises good magic and the latter evil magic or witchcraft. He calls the *ngana* a witchdoctor and the *muroyi* a witch. (The *nganga* is a medicine-man or healer.) Unlike the average anthropologist (after Evans-Pritchard), Dr. Gelfand does not differentiate sorcerer, who uses palpable apparatus, from witch, who does not. Dr. Gelfand relates the functions of both *nganga* and *muroyi* to various spirits and the Shona religion. In my opinion, the use of the term 'witchdoctor' as the English equivalent of *nganga* is misleading, since 'witchdoctor' is used by some authors to specify 'witch-finder'. All these English words should be considered archaic anyway and perhaps new words should be coined. The reviewer agrees with Gelfand on the desirability of using the concept of good and evil as the basis for discussing African magic practices, and has in fact published a classification in some detail of African magic practitioners divided into those of good intent and those of evil intent. Undoubtedly this classification could be improved, but it is simple, clear-cut and practical. The interested reader may refer to 'Traditional Yoruba healers in Nigeria', published in *Man* (65, article no. 102; 115-18, July-August 1965). V. N. Barlow has illustrated Dr. Gelfand's book with 23 attractive drawings.

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